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Michael Roberts
Director General
Rail Delivery Group
2nd floor,
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cc. TOC Managing Directors
Paul Plummer, Network Rail

Dear Michael,

Improving Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD)

Rail passengers should receive consistent, accurate and timely information especially during times of disruption. This will help them to make well informed travel decisions and minimise the confusion and frustration that can arise when, for whatever reason, journeys do not go to plan.

The last six months have seen positive work by the rail industry to provide better passenger information. We have reached a key stage in the delivery of the industry's PIDD improvements as almost half of the planned actions were due to have been completed by the end of June 2015. It provides us with an opportunity to take stock, recognise the good progress that has been made so far and look to the future when we expect to see further improvements delivered alongside a clear assessment of the changes that passengers should now be experiencing.

¹ Use of the name, the Office of Rail and Road, reflects the new highways monitor functions conferred on ORR by the Infrastructure Act 2015. Until this name change is confirmed by legislation, the Office of Rail Regulation will continue to be used in all documents, decisions and matters having legal effects or consequences.

Background

In September 2014 I [wrote to the industry](#) setting out the progress that had been made in processes to ensure that passengers get the information they need when travelling by rail. The Passenger Focus (now Transport Focus) research that was [published at that time](#) showed that despite the improvements that had been made since the introduction of a new licence condition in 2012, passengers were still not feeling informed at times of disruption.

The industry responded to this by developing an action plan which was agreed at a meeting of the National Task Force (NTF) in January 2015. To bring greater transparency to this process and provide confidence that sustained change will be delivered we asked for this plan to be published. However, NTF decided that each individual Train Operating Company (TOC) would communicate externally to passengers and stakeholders what their commitment was to improving information provision to passengers. To date only three TOCs - [London Overground](#), [First Great Western](#) and [Southeastern](#) - have done this. This lack of transparency makes it more difficult to comment on what has to date been a success in terms of delivery. In our meeting with Rail Delivery Group on 25 June I raised the issue of the lack of a published industry plan with you and you helpfully said you would follow this up.

Delivery of industry actions

The industry's PIDD Programme Progress Board (PPPB) has been monitoring the delivery of the actions. It has provided a clear assessment each month and we have carried out our own sample checks to verify it. By the end of June 2015 almost half (19) of the 40 industry actions were due to be completed. Of those, all but two have been delivered by all TOCs². For those two actions the industry has asked for more time to make changes to station systems where repeated automated apologies need to be removed and a new list of more detailed reasons for delay implemented. The NTF has agreed to this request, recognising the additional time that is required to deal with multiple manufacturers so that it can be resolved.

Although some of the completed actions involve improvements to internal company processes there are also some that rail passengers should start to notice and benefit from immediately. These include:

- Defining good practice for website design to ensure that a prominent warning is displayed on desktop and mobile websites and smartphone apps during disruption. Implementation of this is due by March 2017 but warning banners have already been delivered by several train operators including [East Coast](#) and [c2c](#).

² This excludes Southern as their franchise ends shortly and the actions will instead be delivered by the new franchisee GTR.

- Ensuring that timetable changes made on the day are entered into the industry's Darwin database so that they are reflected in real time Customer Information Systems (CIS). Importantly, the completion of the "Darwin CIS" project will mean that the information that passengers see on their smartphone and websites is the same as that displayed on the station information screens. This consistency is essential, provides passengers with reassurance and should further increase the use of the mobile websites and apps which are now widespread across the industry.
- Making sure that temporary timetables for the next day have been entered into systems correctly and are displaying in industry journey planners such as National Rail Enquiries. This should resolve one of the issues that we identified in our investigation into Network Rail's Christmas engineering overrun where late notice changes were not reflected in journey planners or on station information screens.
- Train controllers checking their operator websites and others that show their train information to make sure that disruptions to services are being shown correctly.
- Increasing efforts to inform passengers that they may be entitled to compensation when their train is delayed. This includes doing more to make sure that the necessary forms and procedures are easy to find on websites and where possible on trains and at stations.
- Providing more robust estimates for the duration of any delay and not using the phrase "until further notice". A study of past incidents has allowed typical durations for standard incidents to be included in industry messaging systems.

We are also pleased to see that the industry is commissioning new research, to take place in the autumn and winter of 2015, which will assess whether passengers have noticed the improvements that have been made so far. By publicising that this research is taking place and encouraging passengers to participate there is a better chance that people who have recently experienced travel disruption will be able to record their experiences with respect to the consistency, accuracy, and timeliness of the information that they received. We look forward to seeing the results of this research when it is published in spring 2016. We expect it to be presented at an individual train operator level – as defined in the [ATOC approved code of practice](#) on passenger information during disruption.

Progress on delivery of the remaining actions will be tracked by the PPPB. We will continue to assure ourselves that this monitoring is robust, as well as undertaking our own assessments of the impact that this work is having on passengers.

Next steps

Now that PIDD actions due for delivery in June are generally complete we believe that the relative stability of the next few months will allow time for train operators to get their plans finalised with the necessary Director level sign-off. It is important that a "signed-off" version of each train operator's plan is sent to us each time that it is revised. This will

demonstrate to us that the commitments in the plan are approved at a senior level and are fully embedded within the company.

There are three key actions are due to be completed by October 2015. We expect operators to increase transparency and thereby accountability to passengers by publishing what they are doing under their local delivery plan together with an annual progress report. In addition, we are looking for the industry to help passengers avoid disruption in the first place by promoting the services that are available to allow passengers to check for delays before they travel. These include journey alerts and smartphone apps. However, the first stage of this work is for the industry to review the current suite of services to make sure that they are fit for purpose. Finally, social media has become a key method for many passengers to engage with train operators during disruption. Even those without smartphones can benefit from feeds such as Twitter which are often included on train operator websites to give the latest updates. To ensure that passengers receive consistent information about multi-operator disruption, industry-wide good practice for providing information will be shared within the industry.


Work continues on some longer term actions which are being delivered centrally by the industry rather than by individual train operators. These include:

- Disruption information being included within journey planners to prevent passengers booking seats on trains that have been cancelled;
- Retail systems linking the passenger with the train so that tailored information about the journey can be sent to them (e.g. disruption alerts); and
- Updates to train radio systems so that control room staff can make announcements on trains during disruption.

Consumer policy

During the next few months Stephanie Tobyn, our Deputy Director for Consumers, and myself will be meeting all of the train operators to brief them on the ORR's consumer programme. In addition we will continue to develop our work on PIDD monitoring and reporting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Larkinson', written in a cursive style.

John Larkinson